



Review Article

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AYURVEDIC THERAPEUTICS IN GERIATRIC CARE: A COMPREHENSIVE REVIEW

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ABSTRACT

Ayurveda, the traditional system of medicine in India, offers a comprehensive approach to geriatric care. As the global population ages, there is a growing need for holistic and personalized healthcare strategies for the elderly. Ayurveda, with its emphasis on preventive healthcare and natural remedies, provides a unique perspective on aging and age-related disorders. Geriatrics is a branch of medicine that deals with theories and problems related to the aging process. In Ayurveda, Jara, Jeerna Avastha, and Vridha Avastha are synonyms for aging. It is considered a Svabhavika Vyadhi (a natural condition). Here, vyadhi refers to the discomfort or problems caused to the body as a consequence of this natural process, which has no cure. The main theory behind aging in Ayurveda is the increase in Vata dosha, which hampers or deteriorates the functioning of body systems. This imbalance results in symptoms and diseases that affect nearly every system of the body. Aging impacts individuals physically, mentally, socially, financially, immunologically, and metabolically. Preventive measures in Ayurveda include Dinacharya (daily routine), Ratricharya (night routine), Sadvritta (ethical conduct), and the use of Rasayana (rejuvenation therapies). This review article explores the principles and practices of geriatric care in Ayurveda, highlighting the importance of treatment plans based on the concept of Vata dosha, which governs the aging process. It discusses the role of diet, lifestyle modifications, herbal medicines, and rejuvenation therapies in promoting healthy aging and managing age-related conditions.

Keywords: Geriatrics, Jara, Jeerna- Avastha, Vridha- Avastha, Rasayana

INTRODUCTION

Geriatrics and Ayurveda: An Overview

The term geriatric originates from the Greek words geron (meaning “old man”) and iatros (meaning “healer”). Geriatrics is a branch of medicine that focuses on health promotion, disease prevention, and the treatment of illnesses and disabilities in later stages of life. Aging—referred to in Ayurveda as Jara—is considered a state of physical and psychological weakness resulting from natural physiological changes in the body over time. Gerontology is the scientific study of old age, the process of aging, and the specific problems faced by elderly individuals. According to Acharya Charaka, old age (Jeerna) is defined as the stage of life beginning at 60 years and extending up to 100 years. In Ayurveda, aging is regarded as a Svabhavika Vyadhi (a natural condition). Since it is natural, it cannot be cured or prevented entirely, but its progression can be delayed through proper measures such as Dinacharya (daily routine), Ritucharya (seasonal regimen), and Sadvritta (ethical conduct). Complications of aging can also be managed with Rasayana

therapy, which rejuvenates body tissues and promotes Dhatu-Poshana (nourishment of bodily tissues)¹. As Acharya Charaka states: “He who treats the disease before its commencement or at an early-stage experiences long-lasting happiness.” Preventive methods are therefore considered superior to curative ones in addressing geriatric concerns. Ayurveda emphasizes that geriatric care should begin well before the onset of old age. Youth is the ideal time to adopt practices that reduce the impact of aging. Early discipline in lifestyle helps prevent age-related issues. By maintaining a healthier lifestyle—including proper weight management, regular exercise, balanced nutrition, avoidance of alcohol and tobacco, and active social engagement—one can significantly lower the risk of many age-related diseases².

Table 1: Vridha-Avastha according to various Acharyas

Acharya	Age
Acharya Vagbhata	Above 70 years ³
Acharya Sushruta	Above 70 years ⁴
Acharya vridh vagbhata	Above 60 years ⁵
Acharya Charak	60-100 years ⁶

Table 2: Ten stages of Kshaya

Body function of Kshaya (deterioration)	Definition	Age
Balya	Period of childhood	Up to 10 years of age
Vridhi	Period of adolescence or maturation of body function	Up to 20 years of age
Chavi	Loss of facial glow	after the age of 30
Medha (MedhaTvak)	Loss of skin turgor	after the age of 50
Drishhti	Loss of eyesight	after the age of 60
Sukra	Loss of semen or sexual ability	after the age of 70
Vikrama	Loss of body strength or potency to do work	after the age of 80
Buddhi	Loss of memory	after the age of 90
Karmendriya	Loss of ability of active sense organs e.g. tongue, hands, feet, etc. to perform their functions viz. speaking, grasping, walking	after the age of 100
Ayu	It is the total lifespan	

Sharangdhara Samhita has defined ten stages of Kshaya (deterioration) of body function in life⁷. These are: mentioned in Table 2.

Jara is of two types

Kalaja: As a normal process of time. It is like the wheel of a vehicle that has its own quality and rotates around its axis, which wears out with time. In the same way, the body functions slowly deteriorate after a regular follow-up of Dincharya (daily conduct), Ratricharya (rules to follow during night hours), Ritucharya (conduct according to season), and Hita Vastu (consumption of food items that are healthy and beneficial for the body)⁵.

Akalaja: Aging before the proper time due to some external factors. Just as the wheel of a vehicle deteriorates early if traveling is done on a difficult path (Vishama Pathada) or on a road that is not suitable (Apathada), if the axis and wheel get separated (Aksha Chakra Banga), due to errors in maintenance by the owner (Bahya Vahaka Dosha), loosening of spikes from the wheel (Ani Mokshada), or lack of oiling, etc. Similarly, premature aging occurs if a person exercises excessively (Ayatha Bala Arambha), eats food without considering appetite (Ayatha Agni Abhayavarana), has meals at irregular times (Vishama Bhojana), practices habits not conducive to the body (Vishama Sharirnyasada), engages in excessive sexual intercourse (Atimethunata), lives with unwise people (Asata Sanshryada), suppresses natural urges forcefully (Udirna Vega), fails to control the sense organs, suffers from attacks of disease-causing microorganisms, uncontrolled wind, volcanoes, or natural disasters (Bhuta-Visha-Vayu-Agni Uptapada), experiences accidents or injuries (Abhigatada), does not follow dietary rules (Ahar), or neglects treatment of diseases (Pratikara Vivarjanata)⁵.

In a broad sense, these external factors include nutritional deficiency, stress, and chronic diseases. Accidents and natural disasters result in untimely death rather than the early appearance of aging symptoms.

Obesity is now recognized as one of the nutritional deficiency-related factors that lead to early aging. It is a metabolic disease that can cause various hormonal imbalances in the body, especially involving insulin and reproductive hormones. Obesity also stresses the joints, leading to joint dysfunction and mobility impairment, as well as pulmonary dysfunction and obstructive sleep apnea⁶. The theory of aging in Ayurveda is explained through several interconnected concepts. As life progresses, there is a natural predominance of Vata dosha in the body, a condition known as Vata Vriddhi. This increase in Vata is considered the

primary factor responsible for the aging process. Alongside this, Dhatu Kshaya occurs, which refers to the gradual deterioration and depletion of body tissues. As the tissues weaken, there is also Bala Kshaya, meaning a decline in the strength and functional capacity of these tissues to perform their activities effectively. Finally, aging is marked by Ojo Kshaya, a reduction in Ojas, the vital essence that sustains immunity, vitality, and overall well-being. Together, these processes explain the physical, mental, and functional decline associated with aging in Ayurveda, highlighting the importance of preventive and rejuvenative measures to maintain balance and promote healthy longevity.

Systemic changes and common diseases associated with aging (geriatrics)

Aging is characterized by the progressive structural and functional decline of multiple organ systems, resulting in reduced physiological reserve and increased vulnerability to chronic diseases. In the digestive system, degeneration of taste buds, decreased intestinal motility, and impaired hepatic function lead to reduced appetite, constipation, and altered metabolism. Respiratory aging involves reduced lung elasticity, decreased vital capacity, impaired mucociliary clearance, and chest wall stiffness, which predispose elderly individuals to hypoventilation and respiratory infections such as chronic bronchitis and COPD. Cardiovascular changes include reduced heart rate variability and arterial stiffness, leading to decreased exercise tolerance, isolated systolic hypertension, and episodes of syncope. Renal aging is marked by a decline in glomerular filtration rate and tubular function, causing fluid imbalance, impaired drug excretion, and an increased risk of recurrent urinary tract infections. Neurological aging often involves vitamin B12 deficiency-related neuropathies and progressive neurodegeneration, resulting in sleep disturbances, postural hypotension, and disorders such as dementia, Alzheimer’s disease, and Parkinson’s disease. Endocrine alterations include insulin resistance and reduced secretion of catecholamines and melatonin, contributing to diabetes mellitus, depression, fatigue, and sleep disorders. Skeletal aging is characterized by reduced bone mineral density and joint degeneration, leading to fractures, osteoarthritis, spinal disorders, and decreased stature. Muscular aging results in sarcopenia, which causes weakness, fatigue, and reduced exercise tolerance. Declining sex hormones in the reproductive system lead to sexual dysfunction and, in males, benign prostatic hyperplasia. Immunosenescence increases susceptibility to recurrent infections, while degeneration of the sense organs causes visual and hearing impairments. Oral health also deteriorates with aging due to reduced salivation and weakened periodontal support, leading to xerostomia, gingivitis, and dental caries

Table 3: Review of Ayurvedic drugs according to different age groups

Body function of Kshaya (deterioration)	Rasayana drugs according to different age groups
Balya	Vacha, Kashmiri, Swarna
Vridhi	Kashmiri, Ashwagandha, Bala
Chavi	Loha, Amalaki
Medha (MedhaTvak)	Shankhapushpi, Brahmi, Amalaki
Tvak	Priyala, Smaraji, Bringraj
Drishti	Jyotishmati, triphala, loha, shatavari, amalaki
Sukra	Atamsgupta
Vikrama	Bala
Buddhi	Jatamansi
Karmaendriye	Bala

Age-specific application of Ayurvedic rasayana drugs across the human lifespan

Ayurveda describes age-related physiological changes and recommends specific Rasayana drugs to support growth,

immunity, cognition, tissue strength, and longevity at different stages of life. During Balya avastha (childhood), rapid tissue growth and vulnerability to infections necessitate immune enhancement. Svarnaprashana administered with Vacha, Madhu, and Ghrita enhances humoral immunity, evidenced by increased

serum proteins and IgG levels. Vacha (*Acorus calamus*) exhibits immunomodulatory, neuroprotective, anticonvulsant, and antidepressant activities through interactions with adrenergic, dopaminergic, serotonergic, and GABAergic pathways, justifying its use in Apasmara, Unmada, and Bhuta badha⁷⁻⁹. Classical formulations such as Kalyanaka ghrita, Panchagavya ghrita, and Brahmi ghrita are also indicated as pediatric immunomodulators. During adolescence, hormonal changes predispose individuals to inflammatory conditions such as acne. Kashmari phala (*Gmelina arborea*), described as Raktapitta prashamana, is recommended due to its anti-inflammatory action mediated through inhibition of prostaglandins and related autacoids¹⁰. The young adult age group is more susceptible to allergic and infectious conditions due to environmental exposure. Kevala Amalaki Rasayana, rich in vitamin C and antioxidants, is advised for immune support, skin health, and prevention of degenerative disorders. Given the high prevalence of anemia in women of reproductive age, Lauha Rasayana is also beneficial. From the third decade onwards, cognitive decline begins. Medhya Rasayana such as Mandukaparni, Guduchi, Shankhapushpi, and Yashtimadhu are indicated to support memory and intellect. Shankhapushpi has demonstrated neuroprotective effects, including protection against β -amyloid toxicity and inhibition of acetylcholinesterase and lipoxygenase enzymes,¹¹⁻¹² With advancing age, skin aging, osteoporosis, joint disorders, and hair fall become prominent due to Dhatu kshaya. Bhringaraj (*Eclipta alba*), described as Rasayana, Keshya, and Balya, contains phytoconstituents such as wedelolactone and ursolic acid,

supporting its role in managing musculoskeletal, dermatological, and degenerative disorders¹³. In the fifth decade, ocular disorders such as presbyopia, cataract (Timira), and glaucoma (Adhimantha) are common. Chakshushya Rasayana like Jyotishmati, Amalaki, and Triphala are indicated. Jyotishmati exhibits antioxidant, neuroprotective, and hypolipidemic activities, suggesting a nourishing effect on retinal neurons.¹⁴ During the sixth decade, decline in reproductive function leads to erectile dysfunction and vaginal dryness. Vrishya Rasayana such as Kapikacchu (*Mucuna pruriens*) supports Shukra dhatu, enhances testosterone levels, sperm count, and muscular strength. Its levodopa content substantiates its role in Parkinson's disease management. In the seventh decade, Vata dosha predominance results in generalized weakness (Alpa vikrama). Balya and Vatahara Rasayana drugs such as Bala, Atibala, Vidari, and Varahi are recommended to restore tissue strength. During the eighth decade, cognitive functions like memory, attention, and learning significantly decline.¹⁵ Jatamansi (*Nardostachys jatamansi*), described as Medhya and Balya, has shown efficacy in amnesia, Alzheimer's disease, and attention deficits, along with neuroprotective, anticonvulsant, and cardioprotective activities.¹⁶ In advanced old age, severe debility, loss of motor function, speech difficulty, and urinary disorders are common. Balya Rasayana such as Bala (*Sida cordifolia*) is indicated. Bala churna administered with milk and sugar is effective in urinary disorders (Mutratishara), and experimental studies confirm its anesthetic, Sangrahika, Balya, and Vatahara properties.¹⁷

Table 4: System-wise Rasayana Interventions for Common Geriatric Disorders

System	Common Geriatric Conditions	Important Rasayana / Ayurvedic Drugs
Digestive system	Deranged liver function, constipation, weight loss	Kutki churna, Aloe vera juice, Isabgol, Triphala churna, Haritaki churna, Abhayarishta, Gandharvahastadi kashaya, Eranda taila, Ashwagandha churna
Respiratory system	Bronchitis, COPD	Agastya Rasayanam, Chitraka Haritaki Avaleha, Vasavaleha, Vasa swarasa, Pippali Rasayana
Cardiovascular system	Hyperlipidemia, isolated systolic hypertension, syncope	Rasona (Garlic), Sarpagandha, Arjuna ksheerapaka, Arjunarishta, Punarnava, Mukta shukti, Brahma Rasayana
Excretory system	Recurrent UTI, sphincter dysfunction, renal disorders	Gokshura churna, Chandraprabha vati, Chandanasava, Punarnavadi mandura, Shilajatu Rasayana, Varunadi kwatha
Central nervous system	Postural hypotension, dementia, Alzheimer's, Parkinson's disease	Brahma Rasayana, Mukta shukti, Akik pishiti, Shankhapushpi churna, Saraswatarishta, Brahmi vati, Gotu kola
Endocrine system	Diabetes mellitus	Phalatrikadi kwatha, Nisha Amalaki, Basant Kusumakar Rasa
Skeletal system	Osteoarthritis, degenerative joint disorders	Yogaraja Guggulu, Rasnasaptaka kwatha, Rasnaerandadi kwatha, Dashamoola kwatha
Muscular system	Fatigue, weakness, reduced exercise tolerance	Ashwagandha churna, Balarishta, Dhanwantari gutika
Reproductive system	BPH, impotency, sterility	Varunadi kashaya, Kanchanara Guggulu, Chandraprabha vati
Immune system	Sinusitis, gastroenteritis, shingles, fungal infections	Haridra Khandi, Chitrakadi vati, Bilwadi Avaleha, Nimbadi churna, Balarishta
Sense organs	Cataract, refractive errors, macular degeneration, hearing loss	Saptamrita Lauha, Amalaki churna, Jeevanti ghrita, Maha Triphaladi ghrita, Anu taila
Dental system	Xerostomia, gingivitis, dental caries	Lavagadi vati, Khadiradi vati, Sneha Gandusha

Preventive measures for geriatric patients

Daily regimen for geriatric health (Dinacharya)

Implementing a structured daily routine (Dinacharya) is essential for maintaining health in the elderly. Brahma Muhurta Jagarana (waking before sunrise) helps regulate the biological clock, improves sleep quality, refreshes the mind, and rejuvenates the body through exposure to fresh air and a calm environment. Ushapana (morning intake of 1-1½ glasses of lukewarm water) aids in clearing excess Kapha, removing toxins (Ama), improving digestion, and cleansing body channels. Malatyaga, or timely bowel and urine evacuation, supports digestive health, strengthens pelvic muscles, and prevents constipation. Daily hygiene practices such as Mukha and Netra Prakshalana (mouth and eye washing) remove dirt and bacteria, enhance eye health, prevent irritation, and improve skin glow. Nasya (nasal oil

instillation with medicated oils like Anu Taila) strengthens the head and neck, enhances immunity, and helps prevent headaches, sinusitis, hair greying, and baldness. Kavala and Gandusha (oil pulling and holding) improve oral hygiene, strengthen jaw muscles, and enhance masticatory function. Abhyanga (oil massage), particularly of the head, ears, and feet, pacifies Vata, improves circulation, joint mobility, sleep quality, and immunity. Dietary management is also critical; elderly individuals should consume light, easily digestible foods such as khichdi, porridge, and soft rotis with dal, while avoiding heavy, fatty, and hard-to-digest foods like bajra, maize, urad, rajma, and coarse leafy vegetables. Excess fiber should be limited to prevent gastrointestinal strain and support overall digestive function.

Ritucharya and Rasayana therapy in geriatric health care

Seasonal variations (Ritu) significantly influence health in elderly individuals due to reduced immunity and delayed recovery. Ritucharya, the seasonal regimen described in Ayurveda, emphasizes preventive measures to minimize seasonal morbidity. During Hemanta and Shishira, exposure to cold predisposes to cough and upper respiratory infections; therefore, the use of warm clothing (guru ushna vasa), oil massage (abhyanga), and head oil application (murdhni taila) is advised. In Vasanta, the increased incidence of viral infections warrants practices such as dhumpāna (medicated smoke inhalation), kavala (gargling), and anjana (collyrium application). Greeshma is associated with dehydration and heat-related weakness; hence, a diet comprising sweet, cooling, liquid, and unctuous foods (svadu, shita, drava, snigdha ahara) is recommended. During Varsha, digestive disorders such as food poisoning and gastroenteritis are common; avoidance of contaminated water, excessive exertion, sexual activity, and sun exposure is advised, while intake of sour and salty tastes (amla-lavana rasa) helps support digestion and inhibits microbial growth. In Sharad, heat-induced skin disorders are prevalent, and a light, cooling, sweet, and bitter diet (madhura, laghu, shita, tikta ahara) is beneficial, particularly bitter vegetables.

Rasayana therapy is a specialized branch of Ayurveda aimed at rejuvenation, enhancement of immunity, and maintenance of tissue integrity through the use of herbs, herbo-mineral formulations, diet, lifestyle regulation, and ethical conduct. It promotes optimal nourishment of body tissues (rasa to shukra), thereby increasing resistance to disease and slowing age-related degeneration (7). Commonly recommended Rasayana formulations for the elderly include Brahma Rasayana, Chyawanprash Rasayana (especially during winter), Amalaka Rasayana, and Yashtimadhu administered with milk, which collectively support immunity, vitality, and overall health.

Mental care and social support

Mental care and social support are essential components of geriatric health. Physical weakness in old age often limits daily activities, leading to irritability, stress, and depression; therefore, counselling and education about normal aging help improve coping ability and adherence to daily routines. Practices such as meditation, Om chanting, and Pranayama aid in stress reduction and mental balance. Loss of earning capacity increases dependence on family support, making social and emotional care crucial. Regular interaction with family and friends (mitra mandali) reduces loneliness, improves psychological well-being, and helps elderly individuals adapt better to age-related challenges.

DISCUSSION

Geriatrics, derived from the Greek words geron (old man) and iatros (healer), focuses on health promotion, disease prevention, and the management of age-related conditions. In Ayurveda, aging (Jara) is understood as a progressive structural and functional decline across organ systems, leading to reduced physiological reserve and increased susceptibility to chronic diseases. Acharya Charaka defines old age (Jeerna) as spanning from 60 to 100 years, with aging occurring in two forms: Kalaja (natural) and Akalaja (premature), the latter influenced by lifestyle, diet, stress, chronic disease, and environmental factors. Ayurvedic principles describe aging through four key processes: Vata vriddhi (increase in Vata dosha), Dhatu kshaya (deterioration of body tissues), Bala shaya (decline in tissue strength and functional capacity), and Ojo shaya (loss of vitality and immunity). These changes collectively reflect the weakening of tissue integrity, vitality, and overall physiological function. Systemic manifestations of aging include digestive and metabolic

disturbances, respiratory infections, cardiovascular and renal compromise, neurodegeneration (such as dementia and Parkinson's disease), endocrine dysregulation (diabetes, fatigue), musculoskeletal decline (osteoporosis, sarcopenia), sensory impairment, and dental issues. Ayurveda recommends age-specific Rasayana therapy to mitigate these changes. In childhood (Balya avastha), Svarnaprashana and Vacha are used to enhance immunity. During adolescence, Kashmari phala supports hormonal balance and reduces inflammatory conditions. In adulthood, Medhya Rasayana such as Mandukaparni and Shankhpushpi promote cognition and neuroprotection. Middle and older age groups benefit from Balya, Chakshushya, and Vrishya Rasayana—including Bala, Jyotishmati, and Kapikacchu—to maintain tissue strength, protect neurological function, and support reproductive health. Preventive measures such as Dinacharya (daily regimen), Ritucharya (seasonal regimen), dietary management, mental care, and social support play a vital role in enhancing immunity, reducing stress, and preserving physiological function. Ayurveda emphasizes that early intervention and disciplined lifestyle practices are central to healthy aging, reinforcing the principle that prevention is superior to cure.

CONCLUSION

The aging or jara is a natural process. Over time the body's physiology slows down. Wear and tear though a natural phenomenon but in an old person body loses its capacity to heal or replace the lost tissues. Consequently, a person loses the efficacy or potency to perform their daily activities. Every physiological function or system is also affected in the same way. Though this process cannot be terminated it can be slowed down if a person follows healthy practices early in life. The diseases associated with aging cannot be cured completely but the lifestyle mentioned above can ease the discomfort of a person to a great extent.

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